



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

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CHAFEE ANNOUNCES GRANT TO CONTINUE STUDENT RESEARCH IN SKELETAL MUSCLE DEVELOPMENT

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee announced today that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has notified him that Rhode Island College has been awarded \$202,493 from the National Institute for Child Health and Development. The funding will be used to continue student-conducted research aimed at understanding the function of the Myogenic Regulatory Factor (MRF) gene, which plays an essential role in skeletal muscle development, repair, and regeneration following injury or disuse.

“Encouraging student research at any of Rhode Island’s institutions of higher learning is an excellent way to give these bright minds in-house training in lab research,” Senator Chafee said. “I am pleased that this money is being made available to allow Rhode Island College to provide a way to properly equip these young researchers in an environment that is conducive to their learning, in addition to making substantial progress in the field of genetic research,” he continued.

The grant comes as part of the National Institute of Health’s (NIH) Area Academic Research Enhancement Awards, which is set up for four-year institutions of higher learning and provides opportunities for students to engage first-hand in research studies and analysis. A portion of the grant money will be used to provide students with a small stipend to partially subsidize their cost of living, in an effort to encourage students to focus a majority of their extracurricular time on lab research as opposed to part-time employment. Additionally, the funding will be used to purchase lab equipment in order to better serve the students as well as to provide a means for additional students to participate in this research project.

The experiments conducted in this project address an important gap in our understanding of MRF gene function by determining whether the MRF gene of ascidians, an animal group that represents an evolutionary transition between invertebrates and vertebrates, is required for muscle development. Two experimental approaches will be used to address this question, which include blocking MRF gene expression to determine whether it interferes with muscle development, in addition to investigating whether the ascidian MRF gene can elicit muscle development in a tissue where it is not normally expressed.

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